

Smoking and vaping

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Letters | To limit vaping among the youth, evidence of the harmful effects of e-cigarettes is crucial

- Young Hongkongers say the ban on e-cigarettes will not curb the popularity of vaping. Research findings that clearly show the dangers of vaping would be a more effective deterrent

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Vaping machines are displayed on a counter with other items on shelves inside a shop in Texas on September 6. The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention issued a warning on the use of e-cigarettes. Photo: EPA-EFE

What is the difference between e-cigarettes and traditional cigarettes? Is vaporising nicotine better for your lungs than smoking tobacco? Will vaping prove to be the gateway to cigarette smoking? These are some of the questions Hong Kong teenagers are grappling with.

An e-cigarette is an electronic device that vaporises a liquid for the user to inhale. E-cigarettes heat the liquid so that it is dispersed as an aerosol, rather than combusting tobacco. This means the carcinogens and tar found in cigarettes are absent in e-cigarettes.

However, the effects of inhaling this liquid remain a mystery. Because of the uncertainties posed by e-cigarettes, the Hong Kong government drafted a bill earlier this year to recommend a blanket ban on e-cigarettes.

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Recently, there were more than 450 cases of respiratory diseases suspected to be related to the use of e-cigarettes in the United States, causing seven deaths.



At an event hosted by KELY Support Group and Support! International Foundation earlier this year, young Hongkongers discussed the perceptions of e-cigarette use among their peers.

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Participants said that e-cigarettes have become popular and teenagers are more likely to use them to socialise and bolster their popularity. Social media influencers also showcase positive images of vaping. A student said the variety of flavours offered is an indication of their young target base.

However, participants acknowledged that the use of e-cigarettes can benefit young people intending to stop smoking. Nonetheless, participants observed that many of their peers access nicotine for their first time through e-cigarettes.

Participants were sceptical of the idea of a ban on the industry, speculating that it would fail to curtail the use of e-cigarettes among youngsters.

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Concluding that the risks of e-cigarette smoking remain unclear, participants urged pertinent institutions to conduct more comprehensive research. Until then, the potential dangers of e-cigarettes should warrant the active prevention of e-cigarette use among young people.

Sky Siu, executive director, KELY Support Group, and Alex Yu, immediate past president, Support! International Foundation

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